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QUESTION #13:
Meet the Spartans—an elite group of soldiers who are killing their fellow soldiers. By Denny O'Neil, Denys Cowan and Rick Magyar.

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Experience this latest walk through the nether regions of your soul. By John Ostrander, Del Close, Bruce Patterson, David Lloyd, Donald Simpson and William Messner-Loebs.

MEANWHILE...

BY DICK GIORDANO

"To be or not to be...that is the Question."

All right, so I needed a classy opening to trick you into reading this, which is going to turn out to be a lot of reminiscing about what I was doing twenty years ago today. Everybody else seems to be looking back, pondering where they came from. Why shouldn't I do the same?

As for me, I was working on The Question.

You doubtless already know that The Question was in the Charlton stable of characters way back when. This is going back to around 1967 or '68. As an editor there, the big thing I had going for me was an almost totally free hand in publishing whatever comics I wanted to publish.

That freedom was coupled with my own conviction that in order to get anywhere with Charlton's books I would have to be daring. The other companies were using formula stories that I would never use, or if I could use them they wouldn't feel right for me. We'd done a lot of things different at Charlton; in fact, nearly everything in our approach was different. I mentioned our competitors by name, for example. While the other companies were throwing rocks at each other, calling each other "Brand Ecch" and things like that, I talked about DC and Marvel as wonderful places to work, which they were and still are. I called our characters "action heroes" as opposed to "super heroes" to set them apart. In our house ads, we would say things like, "Buy *The Question*—We need the money." In the face of a lot of hype coming from both companies, I tried to be honest about what I was doing and why. It made us seem different right off the bat.

The Question was different, too. Steve Ditko created him, and looking back, the strip seemed a prototypical version of his Mr. A, pretty hard-edged stuff. While The Question was never quite as hard-edged, we still managed to shake things up a great deal with the character. In one issue, we showed The Question letting a group of thugs drown. He didn't cause it. He just didn't do anything to prevent it, just walked away from it. In those days, comic book heroes didn't do that. We got a lot of mail on it, probably more than I'd ever received on anything else.

My instincts toward the character's success were proven right. *Blue Beetle* and *The Question* were our top two books at Charlton.

We'd put forth an anti-hero of sorts, in an age when anti-heroes held the stage. The Question was different—that word again—from anything else both philosophically and physically. That was something else that had always appealed to me. The Question had no face. Somehow, the character also fit my personal view of heroic fantasy. I often had trouble with costumed characters. Batman's costume served a purpose—it was there to strike fear in the hearts of evildoers. But if a hero didn't need a costume, why should he wear one? The Question filled a desire I had to publish a character who had his adventures in street clothes. Sort of like the Lone Ranger: a mask, but otherwise not a lot to separate him from you and me. It's more real to me somehow.

That's what I like about the new incarnation of The Question. Denny O'Neil's scripts are as gritty and realistic and frightening for their time as the original was for its time. Denny deals with a lot of tough—ahem—questions head-on. The violence is also depicted realistically, not choreographed. This greater realism, for my money, engages your emotions in a much stronger way. It's not hero meets villain in a fantasy setting where dollops of surrealism get in the way of tapping your sympathies.

I think Denny's done a magnificent job of character development on The Question. I also think you're better served by hearing Denny talk about it. So I asked him a little about his approach.

"A lot of it is not too obvious," he says. The Question is one of the few heroes in comics who's not driven by vengeance, or by some abstract notion of justice. His engine is curiosity, with a psychological basis.

"Vic Sage starts off as a disagreeable man with a lot of anger and violence in him. He subscribes to the tough-guy ethic. 'I'm the baddest cat in the valley, but I'm using my toughness for the purposes of good.' That works until you find someone who's tougher. But Sage is a tough guy with aspirations. He works on bettering himself, changing himself. He's aware of his faults. Not free of them necessarily, but he's working on it. There's a subtext to the stories: how will Sage deal with his problems this month. In a lot of ways, The Question will react to things differently now than he would a year ago. I even changed a line of dialogue in the strip just recently because it reminded me too much of how the 'old' Sage would react, as against the more recent one."

Denny was with me back in those old days at Charlton, and I get a kick out of thinking how the brash newcomer of auld lang syne has become one of the elder statesmen of the business.

But lest you think THE QUESTION is strictly old-timers' day, let me introduce you to one of the hottest talents around: Denys Cowan, penciller on THE QUESTION.

Denys credits Denny with giving him a great deal of enthusiasm for the job, which in turn steers the strip toward success. "It's great working with a talented writer," he tells me. "Denny also gives me a hand in the plotting. Before Denny writes a story, he, editor Mike Gold, and I will sit over lunch and talk over the next four issues or so. We throw things around, suggest ideas. The story in issue #3, about the school bus; that came from one of those plotting sessions. The story for issue #15, about the Klan, was a plot suggestion from me."

Denys also approaches drawing THE QUESTION differently. "I'm getting away from representational art. I'm more into shapes and form. It's like geometry for me now. I don't sit there saying, 'This ear has to look just like an ear, and it has to go right here.'" Denys also credits Rick Magyar's contribution to the book's distinctive look. "Rick's one of the most talented inkers currently working. He's phenomenal."

I agree. The whole product is phenomenal. A lot of times, I side with the fans when it comes to the "revitalization" of certain characters. I appreciate their reactions because, as an old comics fan myself, I welcome these revitalizations with mixed emotions. But here, I truly feel the execution is brilliant. The book *is* better.

Thank you and good afternoon.

Dick

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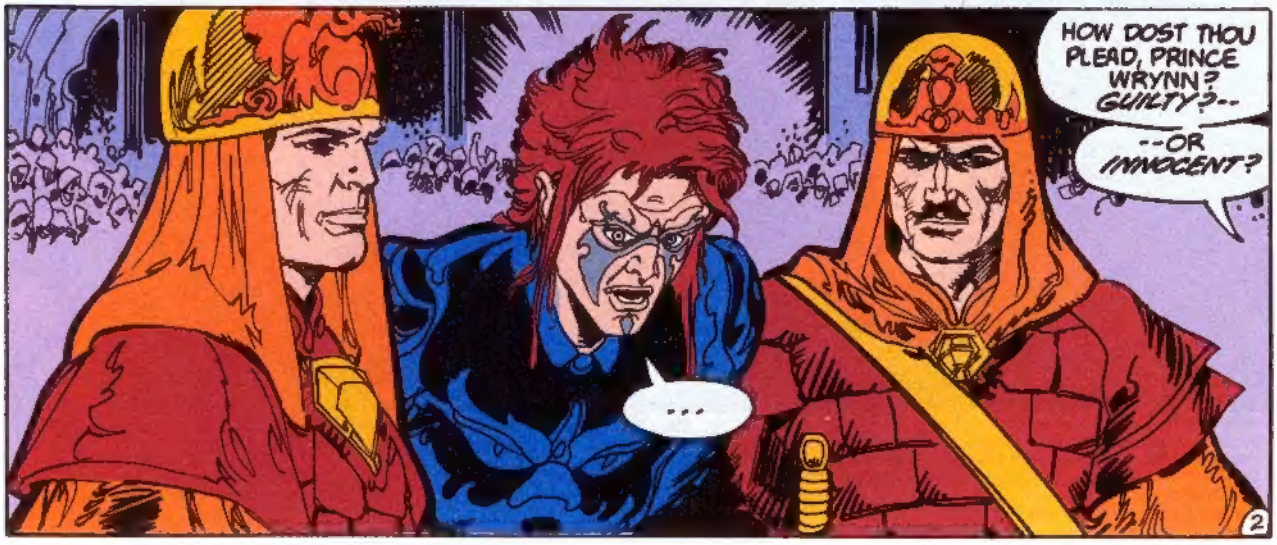
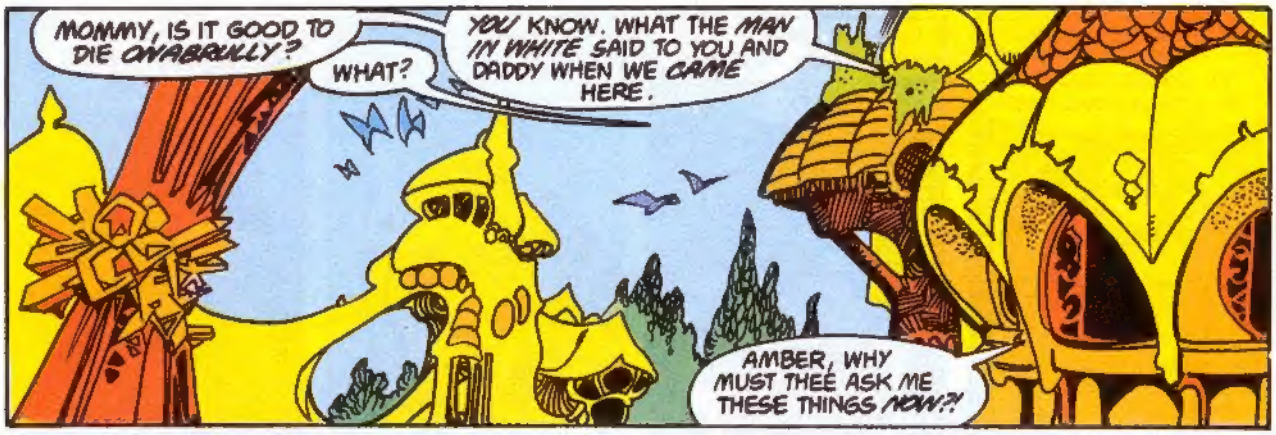
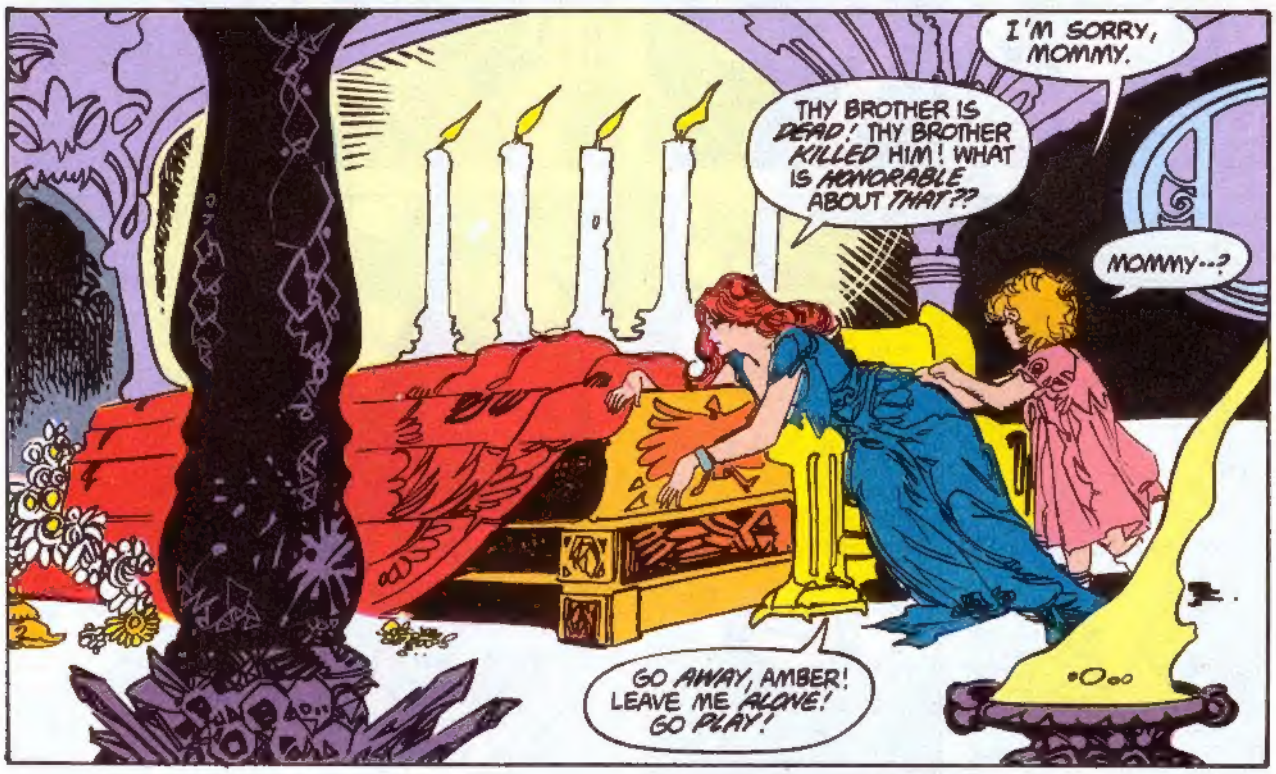
ACROSS OUR WORLD, THOU HAST WALKED A MURDEROUS PATH, MORDRU, LEAVING BROKEN DREAMS AND SOBBING ORPHANS IN THY SHADOW.
THE HOUSE OF GARNET LIES IN RUINS, THE DESERT HAS RECLAIMED SARDONYX, AQUAMARINE HAS BEEN SWEPT CLEAN BY THE SEA WHICH SUSTAINED IT--ALL THE CLANS HAVE SUFFERED BY THY WORK, MORDRU--BUT NONE MORE THAN THY OWN.
'TWILL BE MORE THAN A MIRACLE SHOULD THE GOLD-AND-BLUE COLORS RISE AGAIN, FOR THOU HAS SLAIN THY BROTHER WITH THY OWN HANDS, AND WITH HIM, THE HEARTS OF THY MOTHER AND FATHER.
NOW I ASK THEE, WHAT DEFENSE DOST THEE OFFER? CAN THEE EXPLAIN WHY THEE SOWED A PACT WITH CHAOS?

SPEAK--WE ARE FAIR MEN AND WOMEN, EVEN IN OUR REPUGNANCE OF THY EVIL.


HOW DOST THOU PLEAD, PRINCE WRYNN? GUILTY?--
--OR INNOCENT?
...

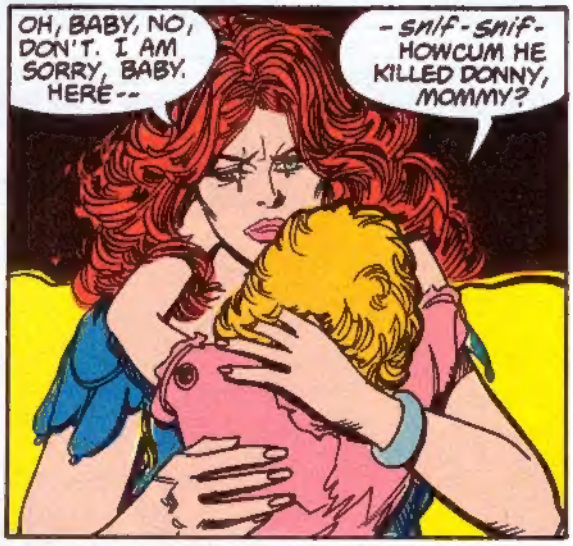
VERY WELL, THEN--
THY CONCLUSIONS, MY LORDS AND LADIES.
'TIS THE ONLY CONCLUSION POSSIBLE--
GUILTY.
GUILTY.
GUILTY! AND MAY HIS BROTHER'S SOUL HOUND HIM FOR ETERNITY!
GUILTY--AND FOR EMERALD, WHICH IS UNDER SAPPHIRE'S PROTECTORATE--
--THE SAME.
THE SEA IS AWASH WITH THE BODIES OF MY PEOPLE. HE IS GUILTY--!
--AND I DEMAND HIS DEATH IN REPARATION!
AYE!
WELL, MY LORD TOPAZ--?
GUILTY.
AND THY WOMAN'S VOTE?
YES. GUILTY.
M'LORD MOONSTONE, THIS TRIBUNAL WOULD REMIND THEE 'TIS NOT THE PARENTS WHO ARE ON TRIAL HERE!
I AM SORRY, TOPAZ, BUT THERE IS NO DISSENTING VOTE THIS DAY. THY SON MUST PAY FOR HIS CRIMES.
PRINCE WRYNN, OR MORDRU AS THOU CALLS THYSELF, THIS COURT FINDS THEE GUILTY, WITHOUT REMORSE, CALLOUS TO THE PAIN OF THY DEEDS, TRULY A SON OF CHAOS.
THY DEATH HAS BEEN CALLED FOR--


MOMMY, IS IT GOOD TO DIE *OVABRULLY*?
WHAT?
YOU KNOW. WHAT THE *MAN IN WHITE* SAID TO YOU AND DADDY WHEN WE *CAME* HERE.
AMBER, WHY MUST THEE ASK ME THESE THINGS *NOW*?!

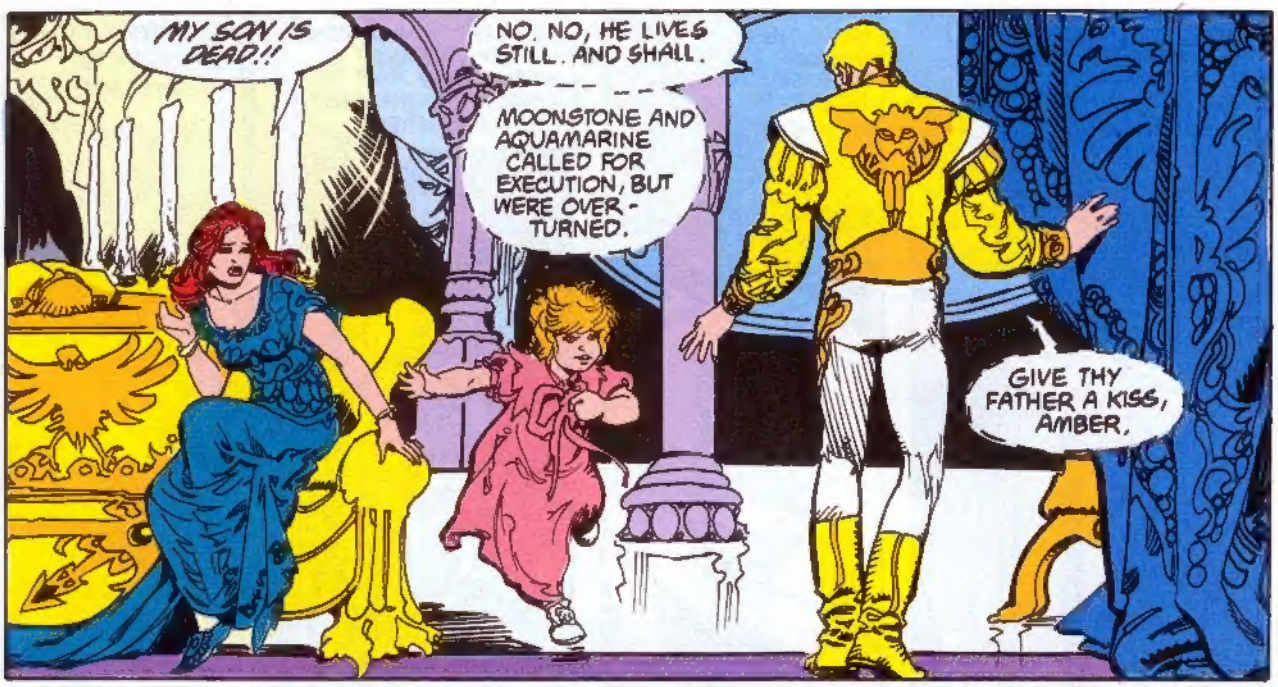

I'M SORRY, MOMMY.
THY BROTHER IS *DEAD*! THY BROTHER *KILLED* HIM! WHAT IS *HONORABLE* ABOUT *THAT*??
MOMMY--?
GO *AWAY*, AMBER! LEAVE ME *ALONE*! GO *PLAY*!

...SNIF-MOMMY, DON'T YOU LOVE ME ANYMORE?
AMBER, *PLEASE*--!!

I HATE WRYNN!!
-SNIF-SNIF-


OH, BABY, NO, DON'T. I AM SORRY, BABY. HERE--
-SNIF-SNIF- HOWCUM HE KILLED DONNY, MOMMY?

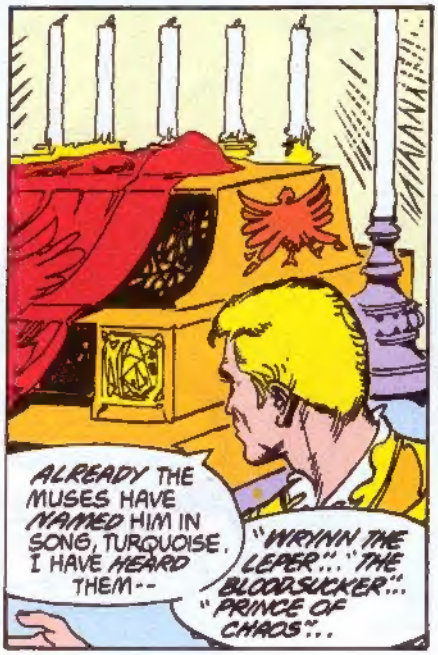
MY LADY--


MY SON IS DEAD!!
NO. NO, HE LIVES STILL. AND SHALL.
MOONSTONE AND AQUAMARINE CALLED FOR EXECUTION, BUT WERE OVER-TURNED.
GIVE THY FATHER A KISS, AMBER.

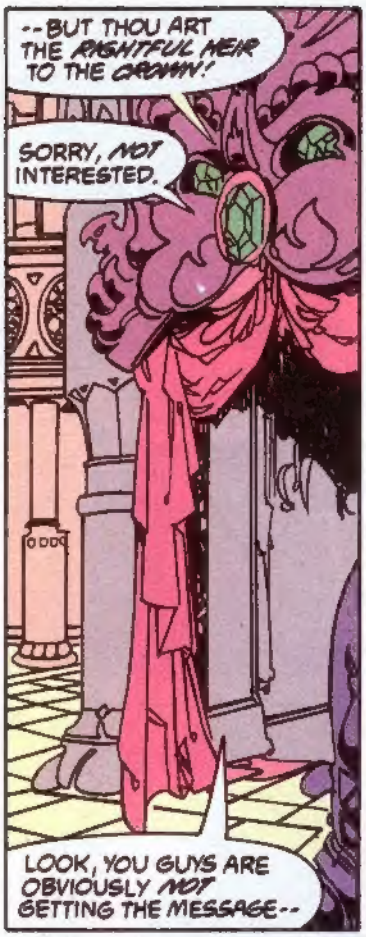
WRYNN WILL LIVE?

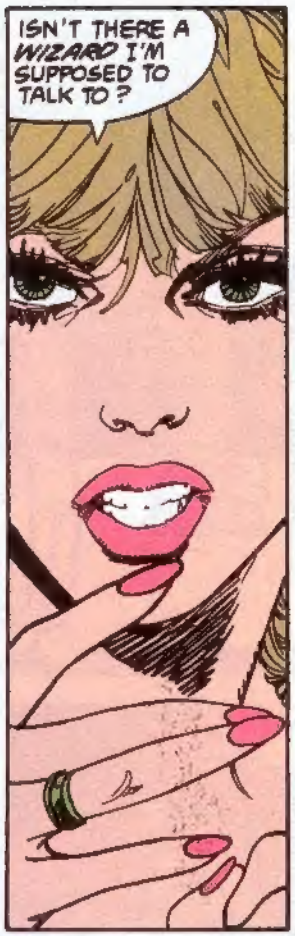
AYE. CONDEMNED TO THE OUTER REALMS--
FOREVER EXILED FROM THE GEMWORLD.

BUT HE LIVES, TOPAZ. HE KILLED HIS BROTHER. BUT STILL...HE'S OUR SON.
SHUNNED FROM SOCIETY, SCORNED AND REVILED--


ALREADY THE MUSES HAVE NAMED HIM IN SONG, TURQUOISE. I HAVE HEARD THEM--
"WRYNN THE LEPER"... "THE BLOODSUCKER"... "PRINCE OF CHAOS"...

... "MORDRU THE TERRIBLE"...





AMNESIA?

QUITE LIKELY.

I DON'T HAVE AMNESIA, I JUST COULDN'T-CARE-LESS!!

MYMYMY, SUCH A TEMPER... JUST LIKE HER MOTHER.

OH DEAR!

HER MOTHER... HMMM--

M'LADY, WOULD THOU LIKE TO SEE THY CORONATION GOWN? THY MOTHER WORE IT.

ODDS BODKINS!

ARRGGGHHHH!!

WHAT WAS THAT?
THE PRINCESS EMERALD TAKES AFTER HER MOTHER, I FEAR.
HMPH!: THE GREEN WIZARDS ARE FOOLS! LEAVE THE GIRL ALONE, AND THEY MIGHT HAVE THEIR LIEGE. BADGER THE CHILD--
--AND THEY WILL CERTAINLY DRIVE HER AWAY. THOU ART A WISE MAN, WHITE OPAL...

...AND ONE WITH STRONG FAITH. I AM JEALOUS.
A PRIEST DOUBTS HIS OWN BELIEFS?
'TWAS NOT A WEARER OF THE DIAMOND CLOAK CHOSEN TO BE HER GARDENER, WHITE OPAL. 'TWAS THEE.

AYE--A MAN WHO RETREATED TO THE SKIES RATHER THAN OPPOSE HIS BROTHER'S OBSCENE PLANS.
I CARED ONLY FOR MYSELF, MY OWN COMFORT, MY OWN SAFETY.

BUT SINCE THAT TIME THOU HAST BEEN CLEANSED OF THY SINS, FOR THOU WAS BRAVE ENOUGH TO FACE THYSELF, AND I--
--I HAVE YET TO CROSS MY RUBICON.
I LOVE HER, UNCLE, AND I DARE NOT TELL HER.

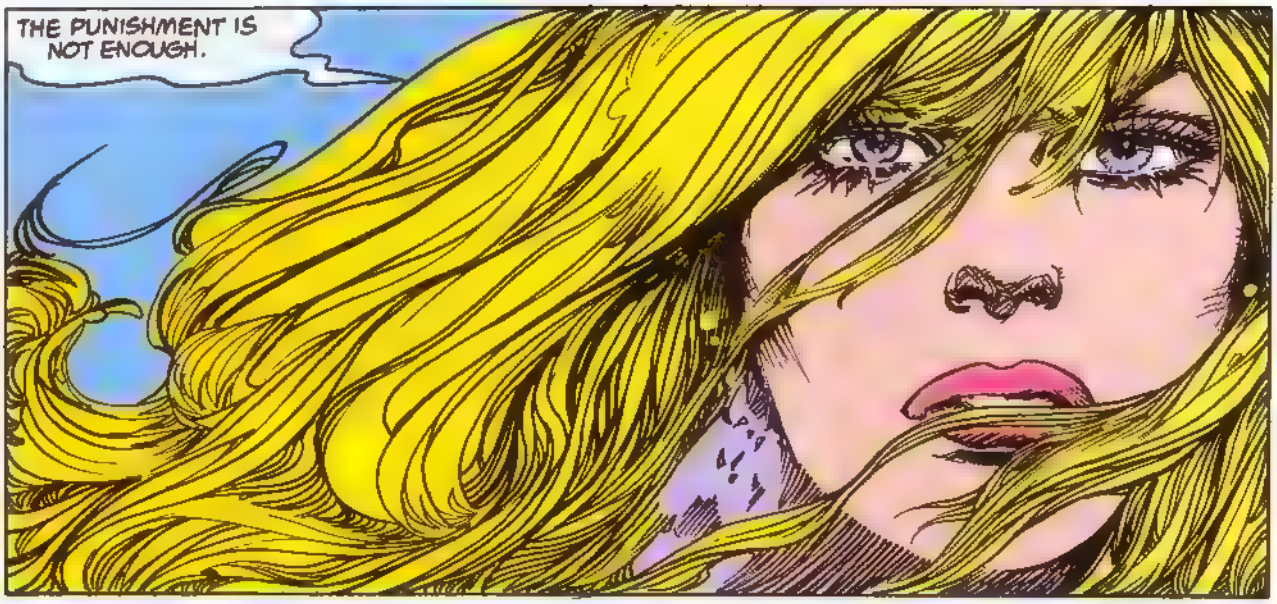
I AM A COWARD.
NO.
YES!--

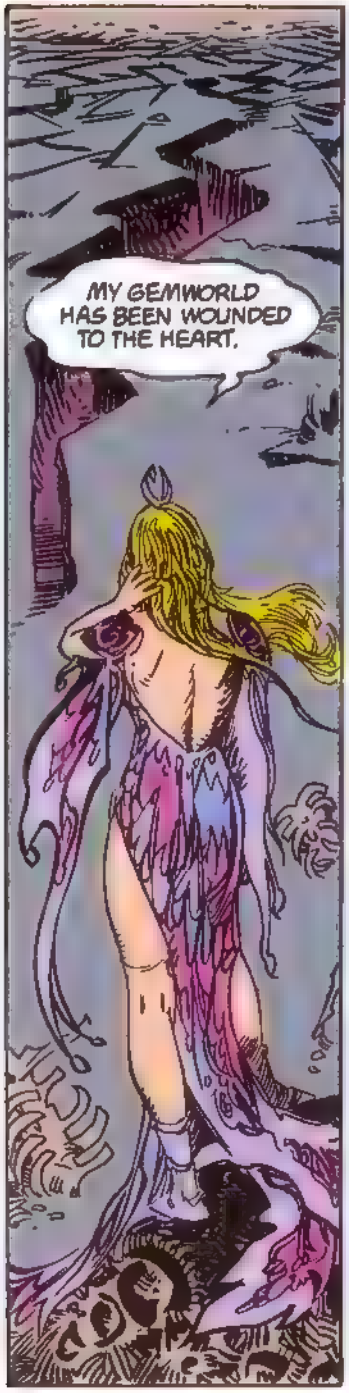
--OR HAS SHE SPOKEN OF ME?

AMETHYST SPEAKS OF ALL MEN--
--FOR ALL MEN.

SHE CANNOT LOVE THEE, NEPHEW.
WHAT CRUEL JOKE IS THIS, UNCLE? I DO NOT UNDERSTAND!

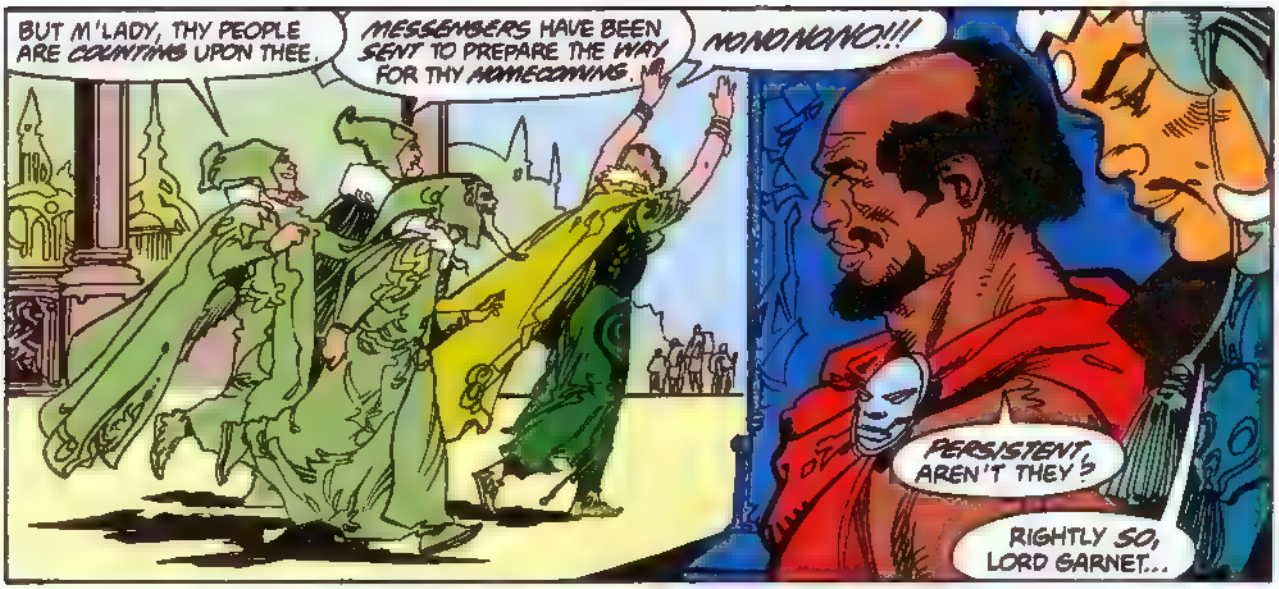
"NEITHER DO I, CARNELIAN.
"HER POWER AND PRESENCE STILL ASTOUNDS ME."

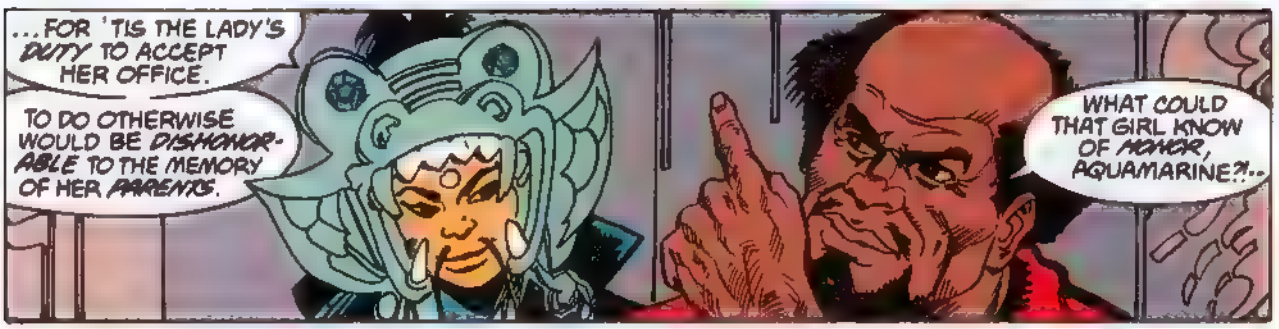

THE PUNISHMENT IS NOT ENOUGH.

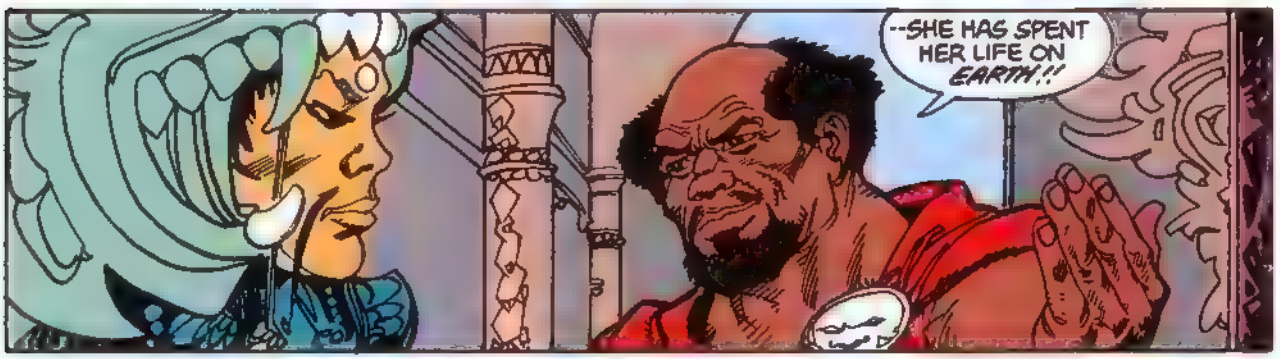

MY GEMWORLD HAS BEEN WOUNDED TO THE HEART.

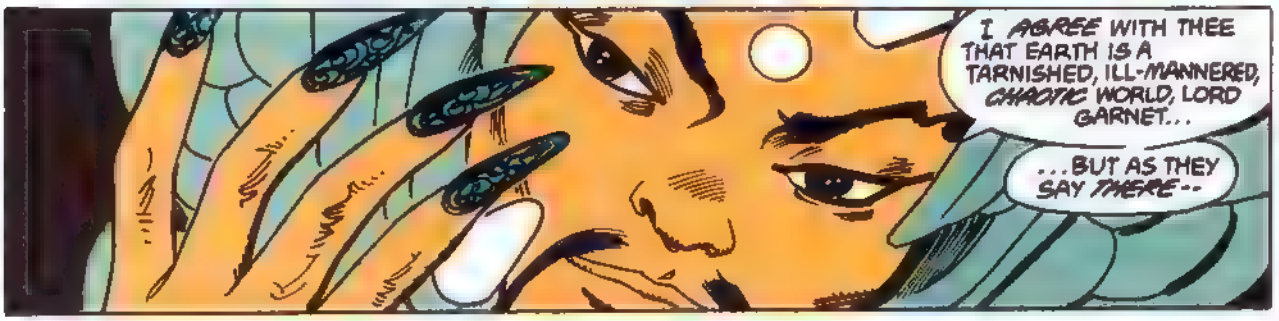
THE SCARS ARE MINE!!

AS WILL BE THE RECKONING!

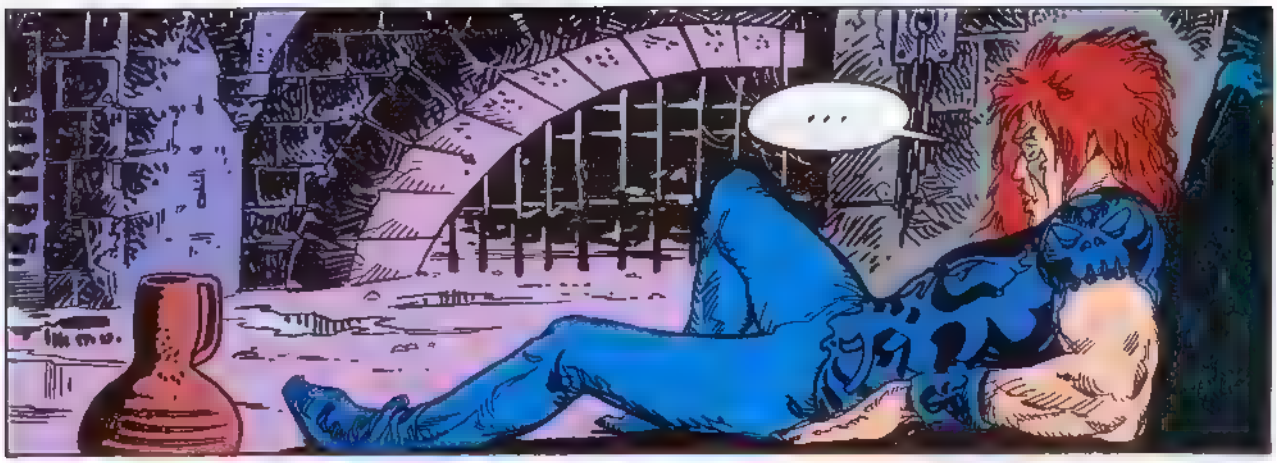

BUT M'LADY, THY PEOPLE ARE COUNTING UPON THEE.
MESSENGERS HAVE BEEN SENT TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR THY HOMECOMING.
NONONONO!!!
PERSISTENT, AREN'T THEY?
RIGHTLY SO, LORD GARNET...


...FOR 'TIS THE LADY'S DUTY TO ACCEPT HER OFFICE.
TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD BE DISHONORABLE TO THE MEMORY OF HER PARENTS.
WHAT COULD THAT GIRL KNOW OF HONOR, AQUAMARINE?!..


--SHE HAS SPENT HER LIFE ON EARTH!!


I AGREE WITH THEE THAT EARTH IS A TARNISHED, ILL-MANNERED, CHAOTIC WORLD, LORD GARNET...
...BUT AS THEY SAY THERE--

--PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN GLASS HOUSES SHOULD NOT THROW STONES.
EH?
WE GAVE BIRTH TO MORDRU, DID WE NOT?
EXCUSE ME.
SUPERCILIOUS YOUNGSTER.



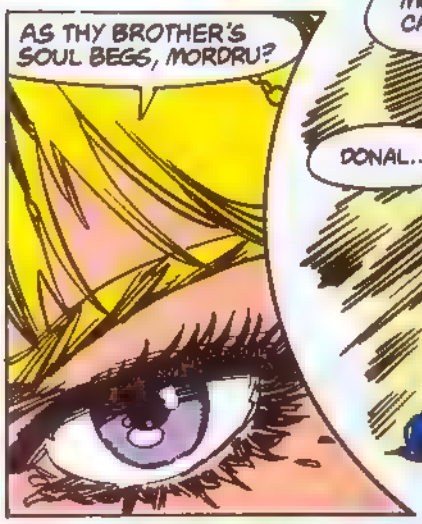
MORDRU, TURN AND FACE ME!

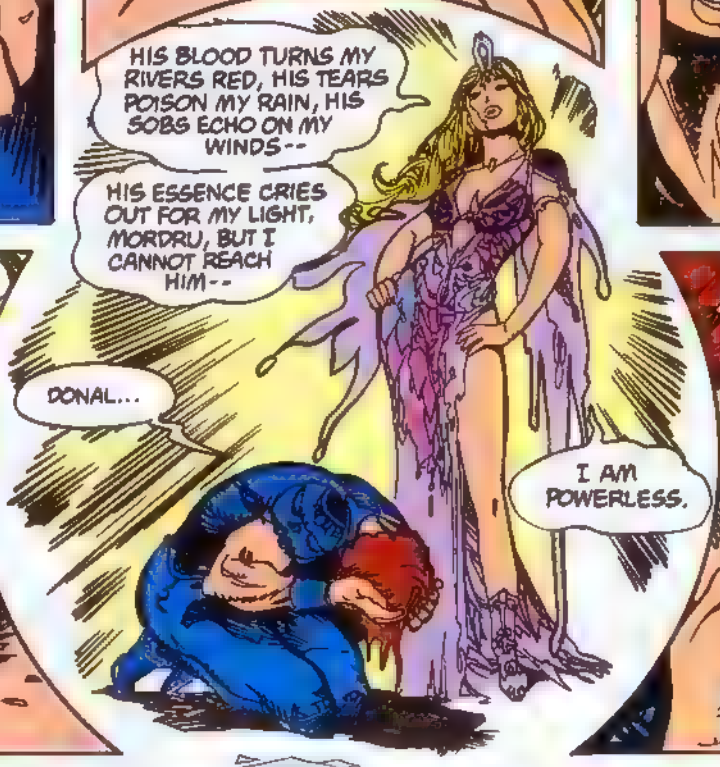
AMETHYST?... NO! GO AWAY!...

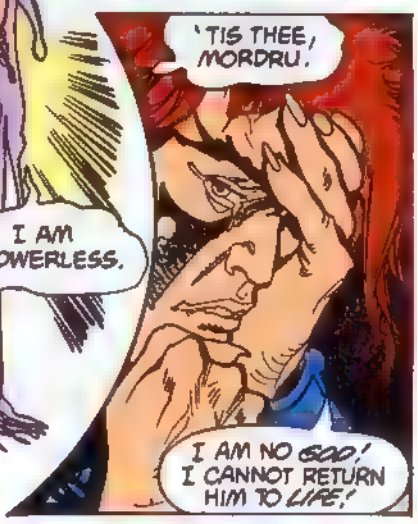
...LEAVE ME ALONE!
I HAVE PAID ENOUGH!

NO

PLEASE!... I BEG THEE--!

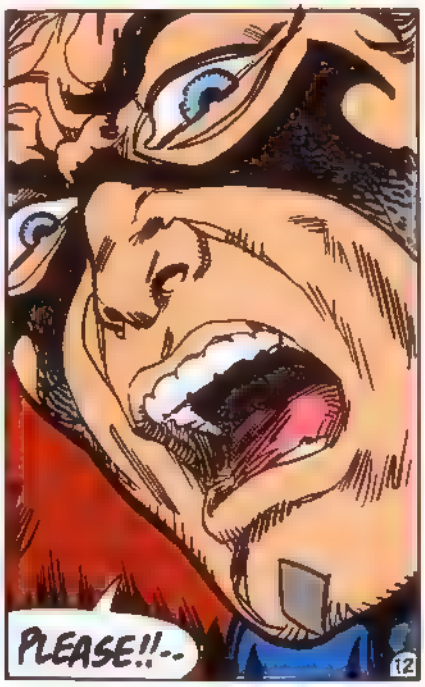

AS THY BROTHER'S SOUL BEGS, MORDRU?


HIS BLOOD TURNS MY RIVERS RED, HIS TEARS POISON MY RAIN, HIS SOBS ECHO ON MY WINDS--
HIS ESSENCE CRIES OUT FOR MY LIGHT, MORDRU, BUT I CANNOT REACH HIM--
DONAL...
I AM POWERLESS.


'TIS THEE, MORDRU.
I AM NO GOD! I CANNOT RETURN HIM TO LIFE!

THOU CAN EASE HIS LONELINESS.
YES! YES, MY LADY! DO WHAT YOU RETURNED TO DO!
END THIS THING! KILL ME! KILL ME!

NO.


PLEASE!!--

THOU SHALL LIVE, MORDRU.

NO! PLEASE... NO!

EACH BREATH THOU TAKES SHALL BE MET WITH THE DUST OF MY PLANET... THY LUNGS SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE RUBBLE OF MY HANDIWORK... BUT THOU SHALL NOT DIE.

NO!

THY SKIN SHALL CRAWL WITH THE ITCHINGS OF A THOUSAND ANTS AS MAGGOTS BURY THEIR YOUNG INSIDE THEE...

THOU SHALL OPEN THY MOUTH TO SCREAM AND THE LARVAE OF LOCUSTS SHALL FEAST UPON THY TONGUE... THY HAIR SHALL BE THE NESTING PLACE OF EARTHWORMS...

NOOOO!

...WHILE THINE EYES AND EARS SHALL BE OPEN TO THY BROTHER DONAL, WHOSE DEATH WAS A TRAVESTY, AND WHOSE GRAVE SHALL NEVER BE SILENT.

LIVE WITH THIS GHOST, MORDRU. BEG HIM FOR FORGIVENESS. BEG HIM FOR RELEASE FROM THY PRISON...

...FOR I AM DONE WITH THEE.

YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE I COULD GET A PAIR OF RUBY SLIPPERS, *CHEAP*, WOULD YOU?

DIDN'T *THINK* SO--*SIGH*--YOU EVER *TRIP* ON THOSE *EARS*?

OH, *FORGET* IT... I GIVE UP. GUESS I'M *STUCK* HERE.

DO NOT DESPAIR, EMMY.

I AM NOT DONE WITH THEE YET.

AMY--?

WILL THOU HELP ME?

HELP *ME*, AMY! TAKE ME *HOME*!!

AYE, CHILD. THOU SHALL GO HOME--

--BUT NOT ALONE.

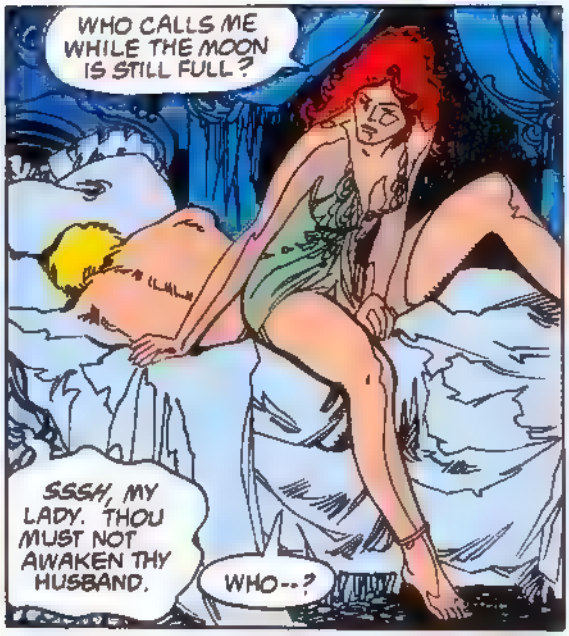
NO OTHER WOULD I TRUST WITH MY CHARGE.

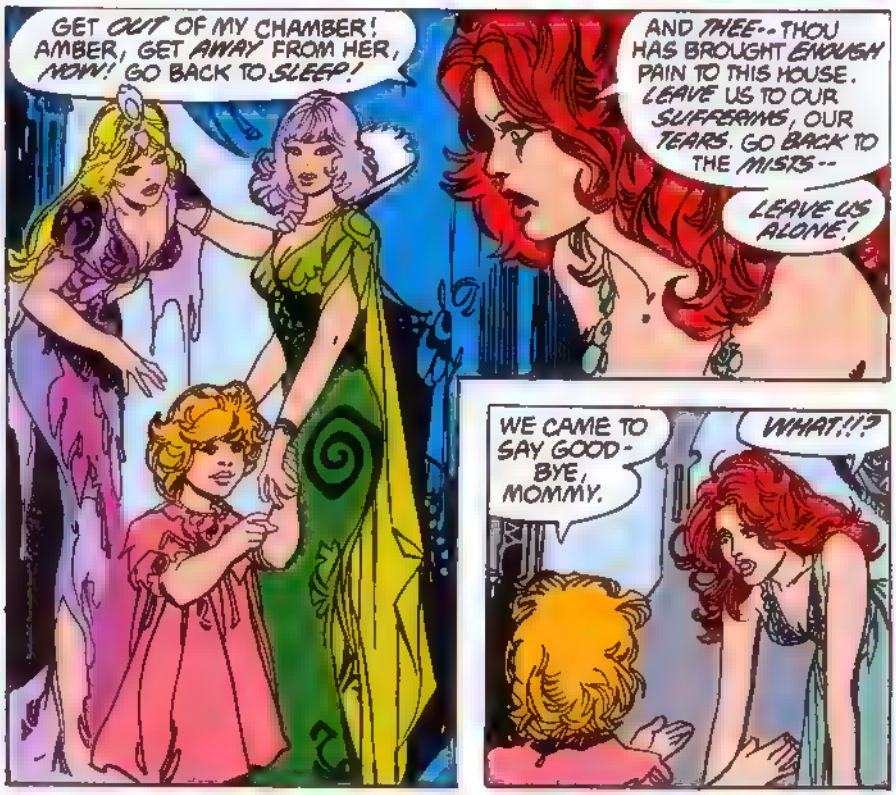
A-AMY?

AMY? NO MORE.

LISTEN NOW. UNDERSTAND...

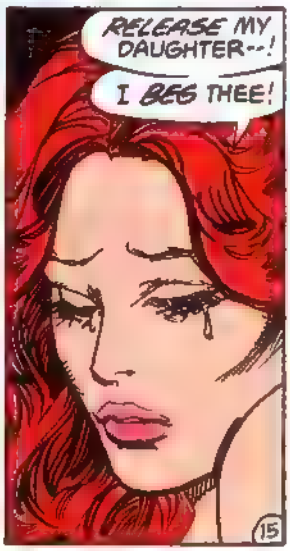
LADY TURQUOISE
YES?
ARISE, MY LADY.

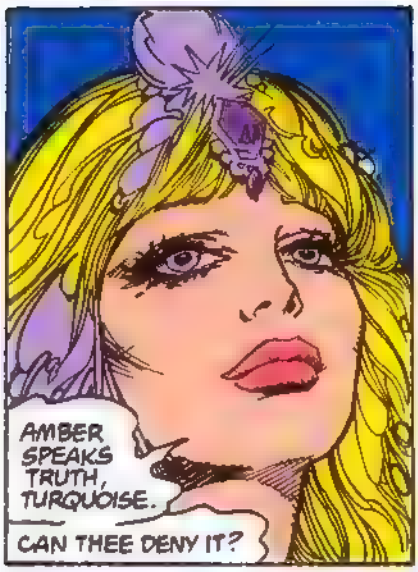

WHO CALLS ME WHILE THE MOON IS STILL FULL?
SSSH, MY LADY. THOU MUST NOT AWAKEN THY HUSBAND.
WHO--?

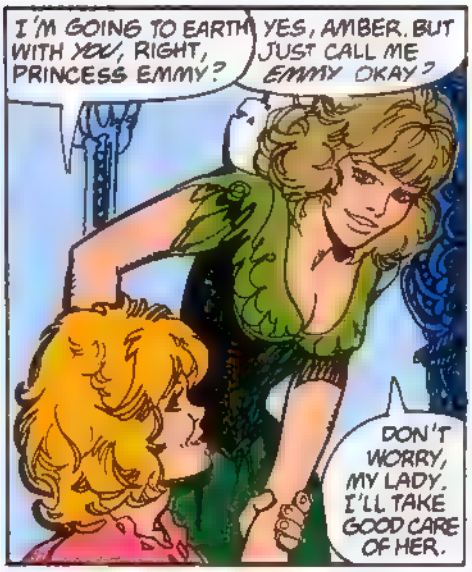

GET OUT OF MY CHAMBER! AMBER, GET AWAY FROM HER, NOW! GO BACK TO SLEEP!
AND THEE--THOU HAS BROUGHT ENOUGH PAIN TO THIS HOUSE. LEAVE US TO OUR SUFFERING, OUR TEARS. GO BACK TO THE MISTS--
LEAVE US ALONE!
WE CAME TO SAY GOOD-BYE, MOMMY.
WHAT!!?

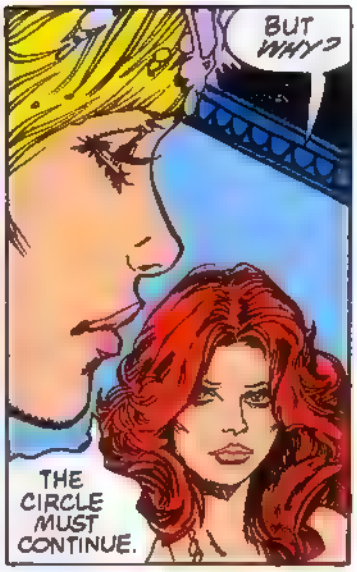
SEE, YOU'RE NOT REALLY MY MOMMY, AND DADDY ISN'T MY--

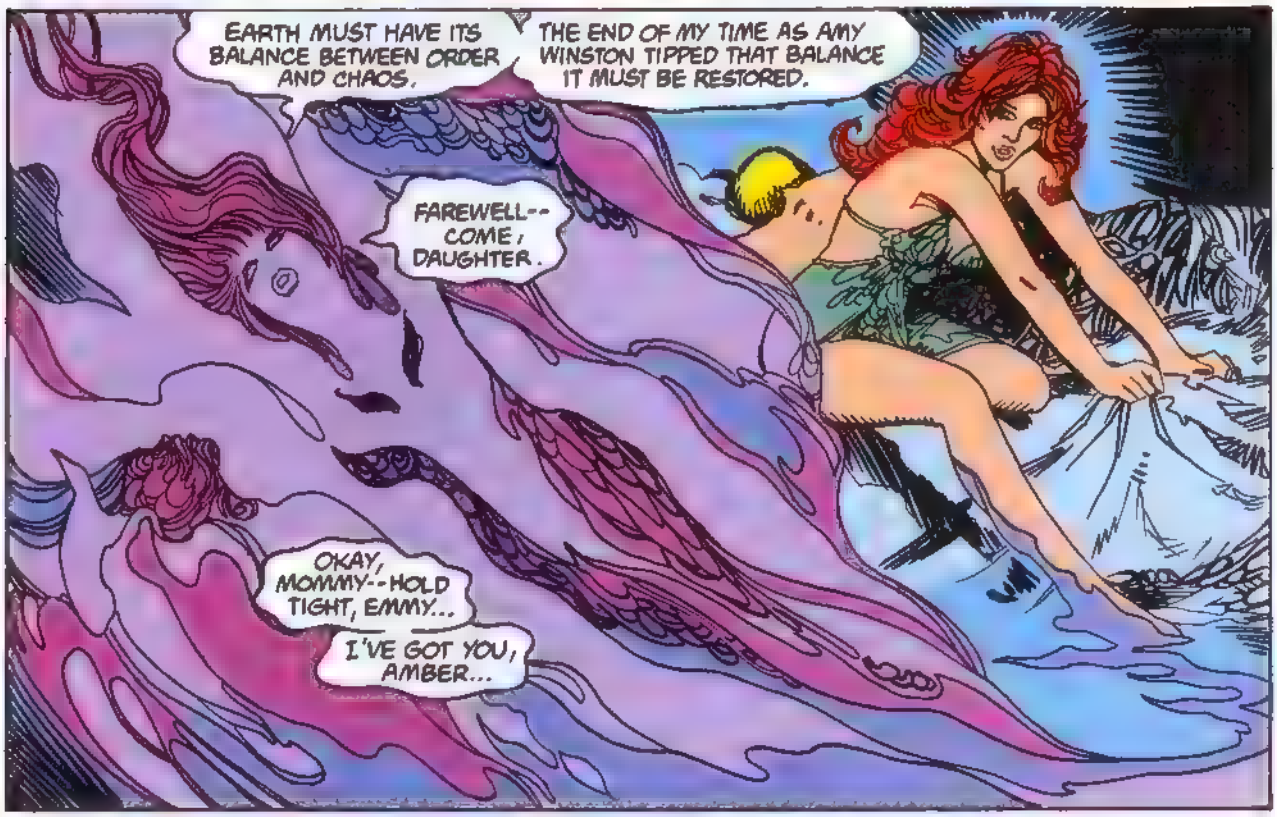
WHAT HAS THEE DONE TO HER??!

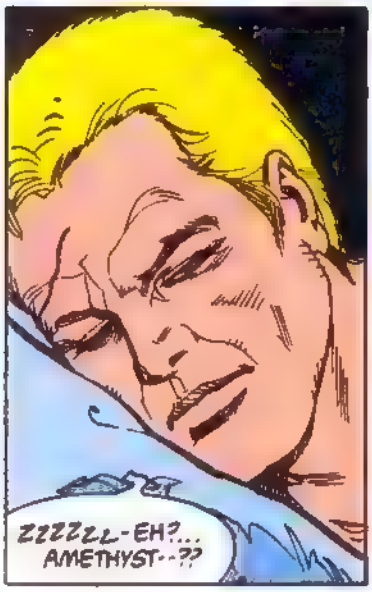

RELEASE MY DAUGHTER--!
I BEG THEE!

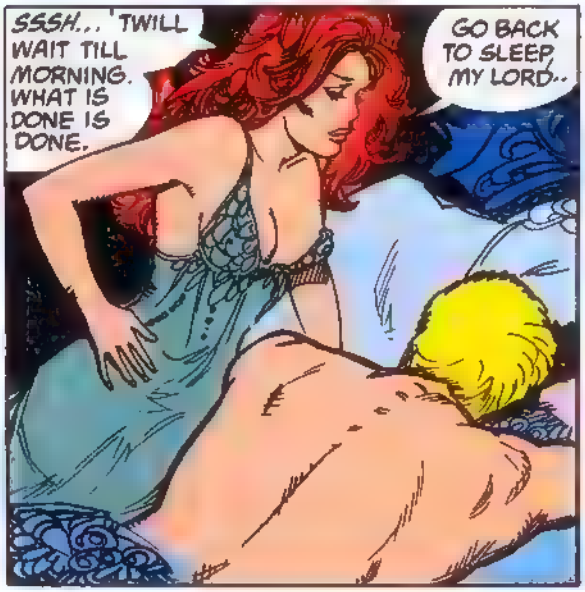

AMBER SPEAKS TRUTH, TURQUOISE.
CAN THEE DENY IT?


I'M GOING TO EARTH WITH YOU, RIGHT, PRINCESS EMMY?
YES, AMBER. BUT JUST CALL ME EMMY OKAY?
DON'T WORRY, MY LADY. I'LL TAKE GOOD CARE OF HER.


BUT WHY?
THE CIRCLE MUST CONTINUE.


EARTH MUST HAVE ITS BALANCE BETWEEN ORDER AND CHAOS.
THE END OF MY TIME AS AMY WINSTON TIPPED THAT BALANCE IT MUST BE RESTORED.
FAREWELL-- COME, DAUGHTER.
OKAY, MOMMY--HOLD TIGHT, EMMY...
I'VE GOT YOU, AMBER...


ZZZZZZL-EH?... AMETHYST--??


SSSH... 'TWILL WAIT TILL MORNING. WHAT IS DONE IS DONE.
GO BACK TO SLEEP, MY LORD..

--MY LOVE.

DAWN BREAKS ON THE GEMMWORLD. RUBY-TINTED LANCES SPLIT THE OBSIDIAN NIGHT, SHATTERING THE DARKNESS OF YESTERDAY..

-- SETTING FREE THE LIGHT OF TODAY. AND OLD FRIENDS GATHER...

'TIS STRANGE-- I KNOW 'TWAS NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO THAT WE SAT HERE ON THE EVE OF THY WEDDING, AND YET--

AYE, GARNET. BUT THE REALITY OF THOSE YEARS IS AS COLD AND UNYIELDING AS THE TOMB OF OUR CHILDREN.

BUT MORDRU WAS NOT THY SON!! AND HE KILLED! FORGIVE ME, TOPAZ.

MORDRU WAS OUR SON, GARNET. AS MUCH AS AMBER IS OUR DAUGHTER.

MORDRU'S BODY WAS FOUND, THEN?

NO. WE BURIED THE SWORD HE CARRIED AS WRYNN.

BUT, WHERE IS YOUNG AMBER?

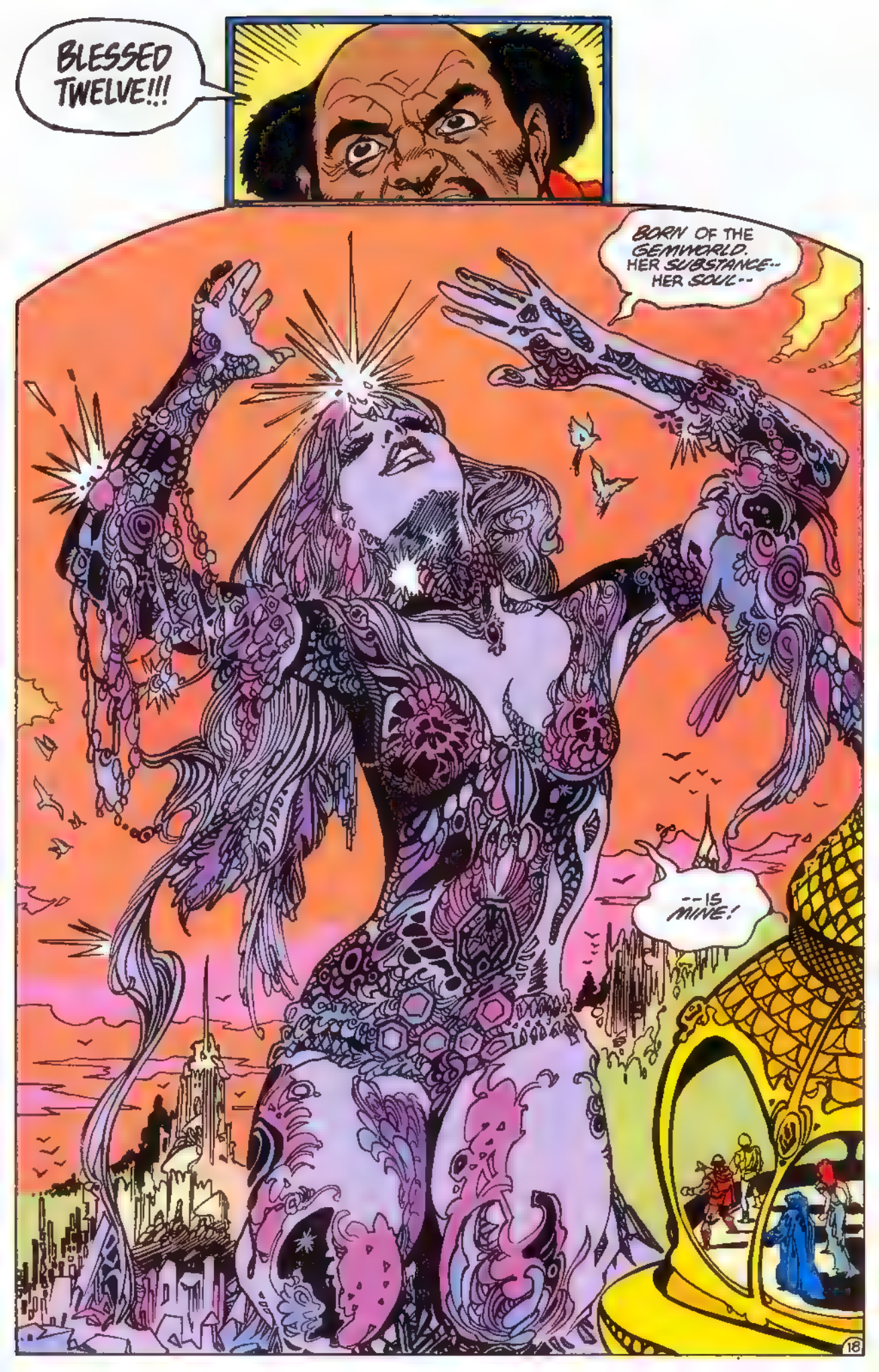
ONE DAY I WAS HUNTING IN THE FOREST. NEAR THE HUT OF WHITE OPAL.

HE FOUND HER IN THE SHELTER OF A GLADE. JUST A BABY...

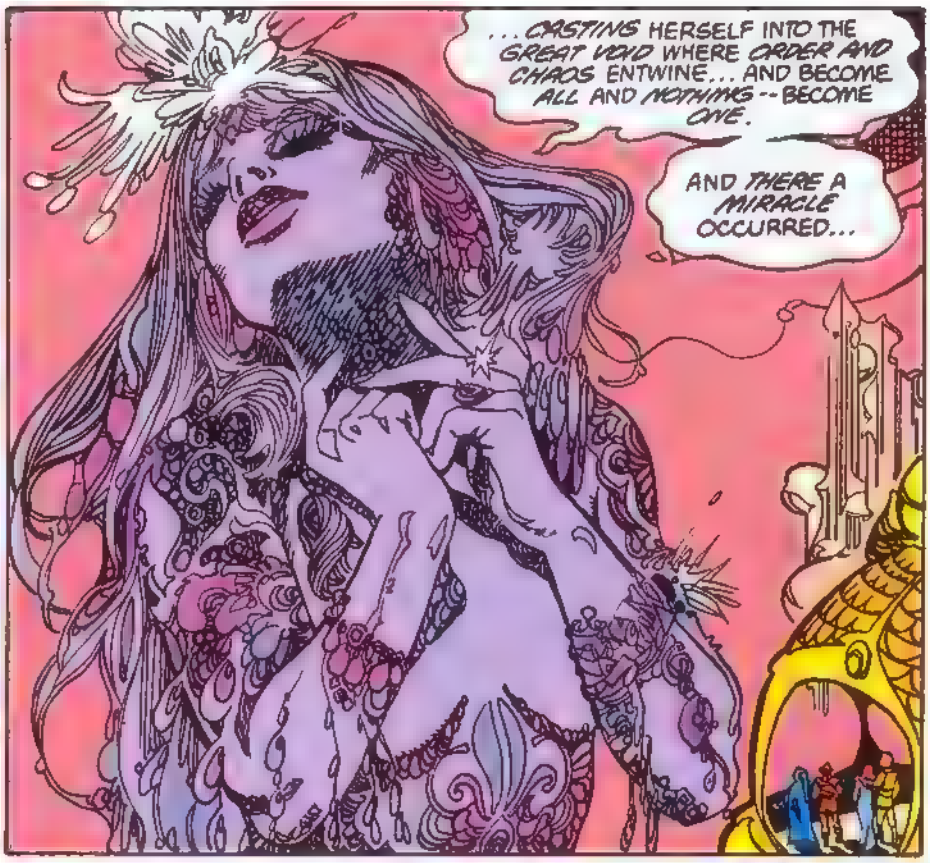
AMBER?

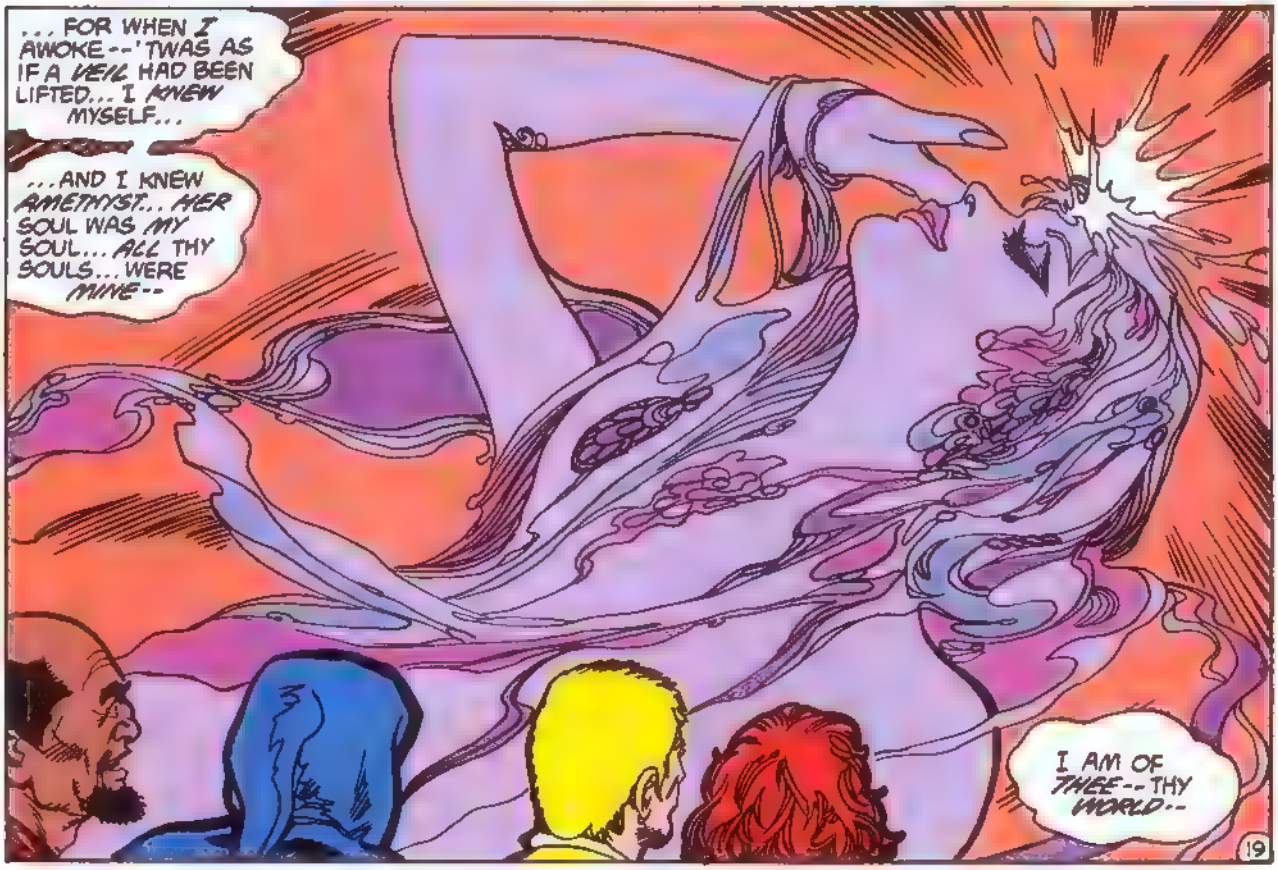
THEN WHOSE CHILD WAS SHE?

SHE IS AS I AM!


BLESSED TWELVE!!!
BORN OF THE GEMWORLD. HER SUBSTANCE-- HER SOUL--
--IS MINE!

THE WOMAN KNOWN AS AMETHYST IS DEAD
SHE DIED AS THY LEGENDS SAY...


...CASTING HERSELF INTO THE GREAT VOID WHERE ORDER AND CHAOS ENTWINE... AND BECOME ALL AND NOTHING -- BECOME ONE.
AND THERE A MIRACLE OCCURRED...


...FOR WHEN I AWOKE -- 'TWAS AS IF A VEIL HAD BEEN LIFTED... I KNEW MYSELF...
...AND I KNEW AMETHYST... HER SOUL WAS MY SOUL... ALL THY SOULS... WERE MINE --
I AM OF THEE -- THY WORLD --

I AM THE GEMWORLD!--

--AND CHAOS WILL NEVER HAVE ME!

NEVERRRRRRR

SO THOU HAS RETURNED TO THE WOODLANDS, WHITE OPAL.

'TIS WHERE I BELONG, MY LADY.

I AM THE GARDENER, AM I NOT?

AYE, MY LORD. ALWAYS.

DIDST THOU THINK 'TWOULD CHANGE?

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED, MY LADY.

'TIS THE ORDER OF THINGS--

DO I FRIGHTEN THEE, OLD FRIEND?

ME? WHY, LASSIE--

--I KNEW THEE WHEN.

COME, AMETHYST. I WILL MAKE US SUPPER, PERHAPS IF THOU ARE GOOD AND MIND THY MANNERS.

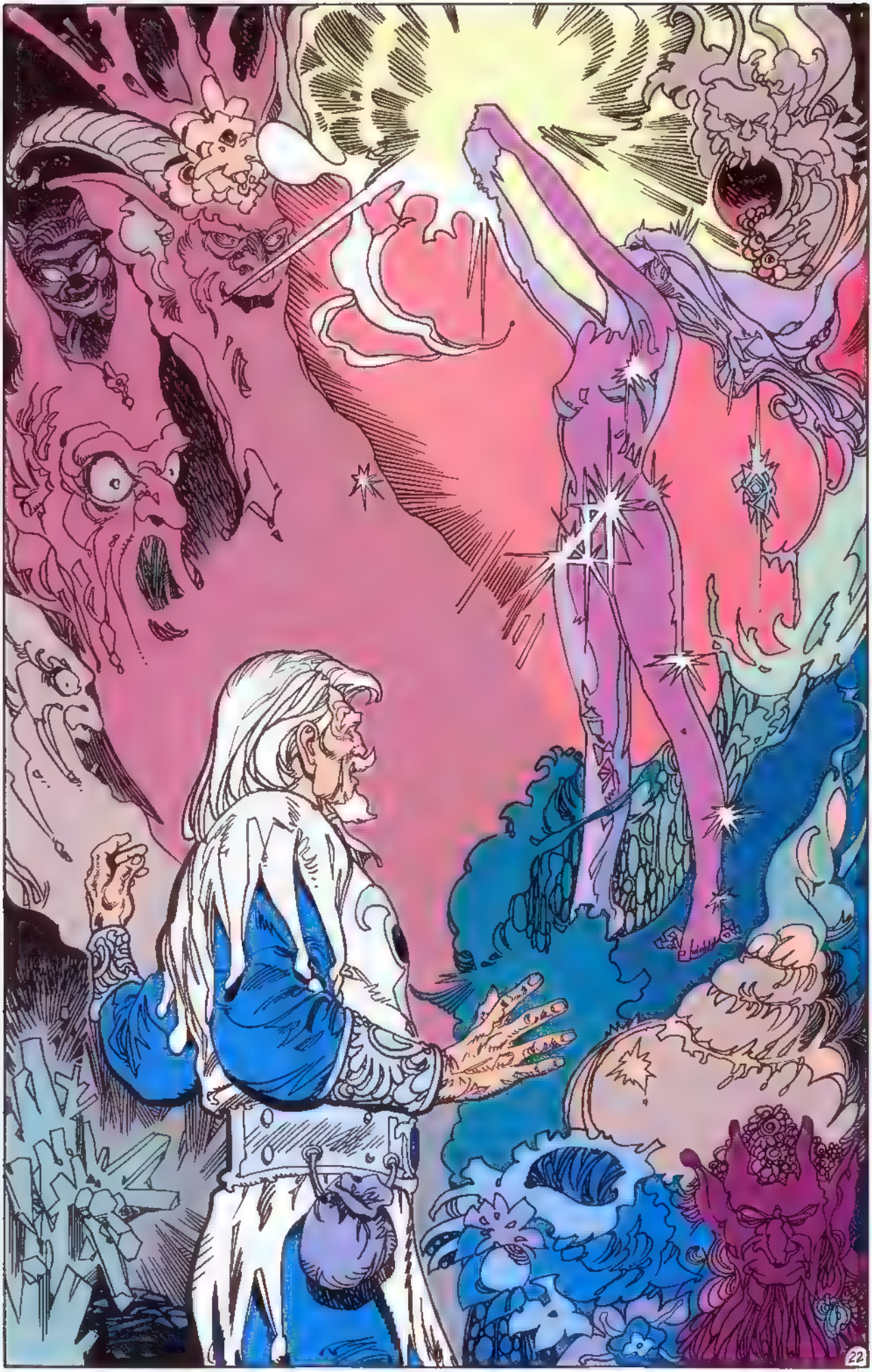
AND THEN WE MUST GET STARTED.

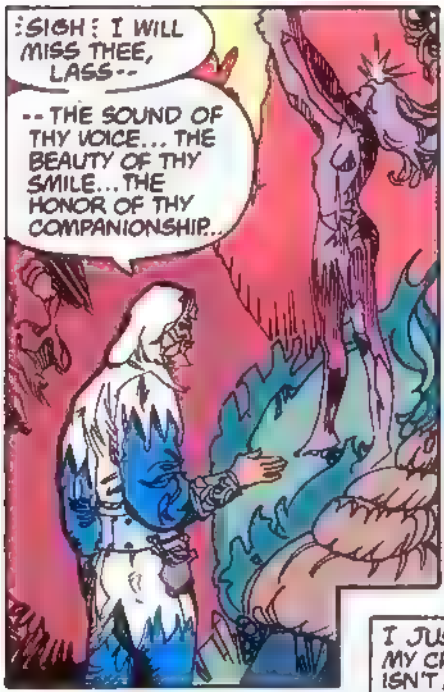
THERE IS MUCH TO DO.

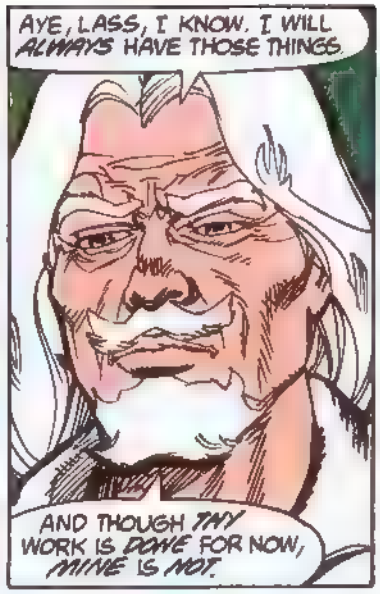
JUST CHARTING THE NEW STARS--

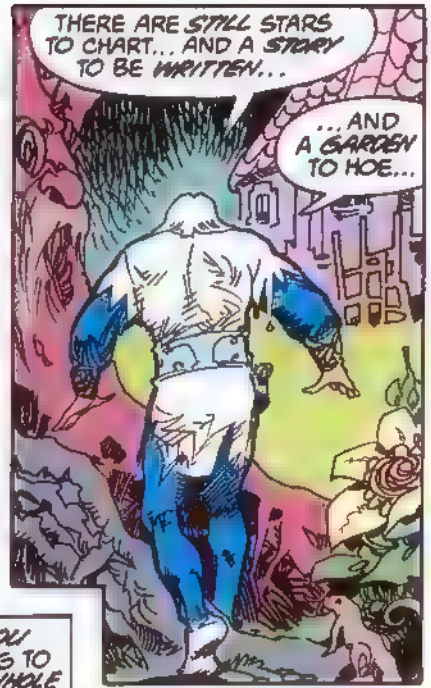
--'TWILL KEEP US BUSY FOR MONTHS, EH, AMETHYST?

AMETH--?

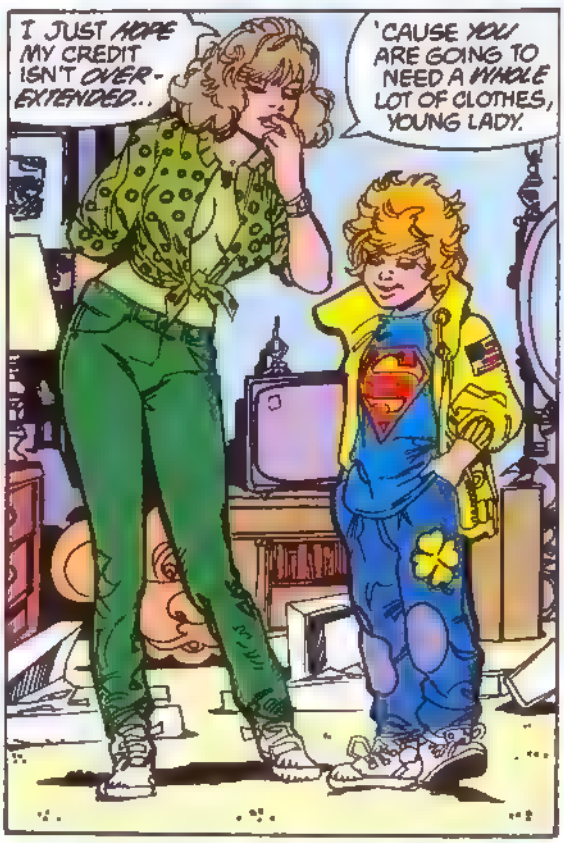



:SIGH: I WILL MISS THEE, LASS--
--THE SOUND OF THY VOICE... THE BEAUTY OF THY SMILE... THE HONOR OF THY COMPANIONSHIP...

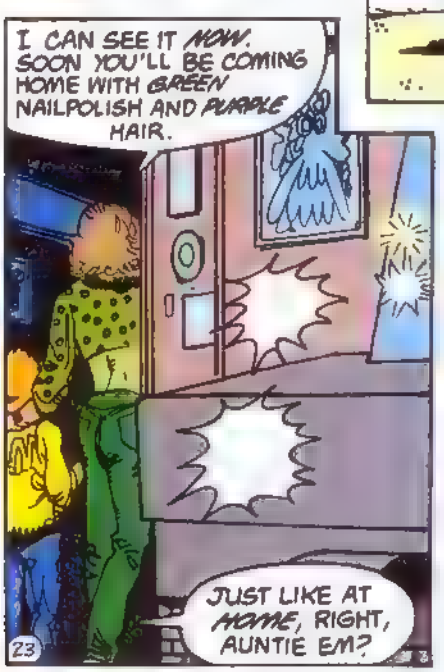

AYE, LASS, I KNOW. I WILL ALWAYS HAVE THOSE THINGS.
AND THOUGH THY WORK IS DONE FOR NOW, MINE IS NOT.

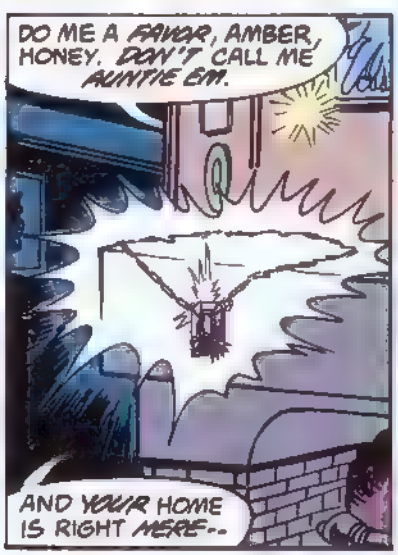

THERE ARE STILL STARS TO CHART... AND A STORY TO BE WRITTEN...
...AND A GARDEN TO HOE...

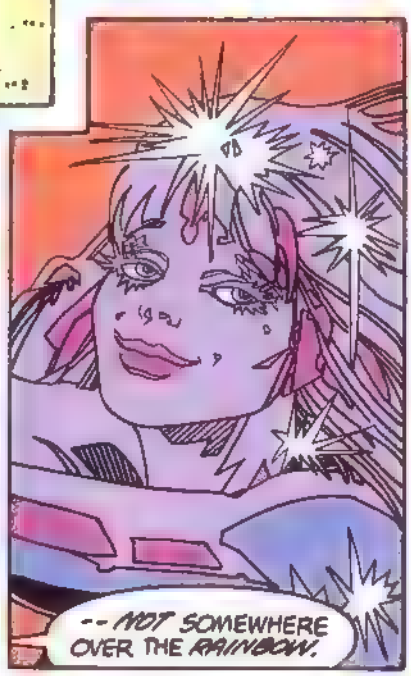
SO MANY THINGS TO DO... REGISTER YOU FOR SCHOOL... MAKE APPOINTMENTS WITH THE DOCTOR AND THE DENTIST...
...AND I THINK WE'D BETTER MAKE A TRIP TO BLOOMINGDALE'S.

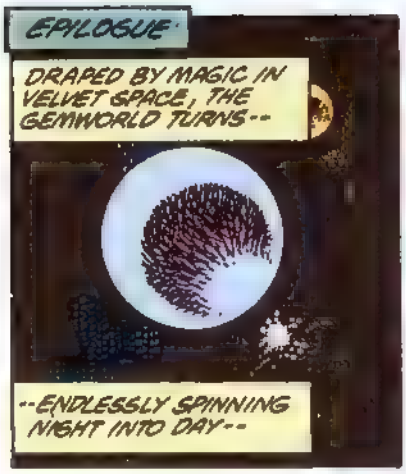

I JUST HOPE MY CREDIT ISN'T OVER-EXTENDED...
'CAUSE YOU ARE GOING TO NEED A WHOLE LOT OF CLOTHES, YOUNG LADY.

WHY? I LIKE THIS STUFF!

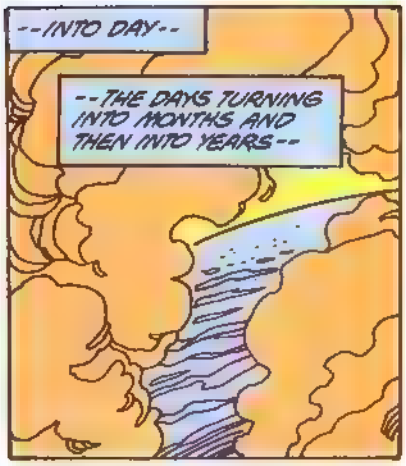

I CAN SEE IT NOW. SOON YOU'LL BE COMING HOME WITH GREEN NAILPOLISH AND PURPLE HAIR.
JUST LIKE AT HOME, RIGHT, AUNTIE EM?

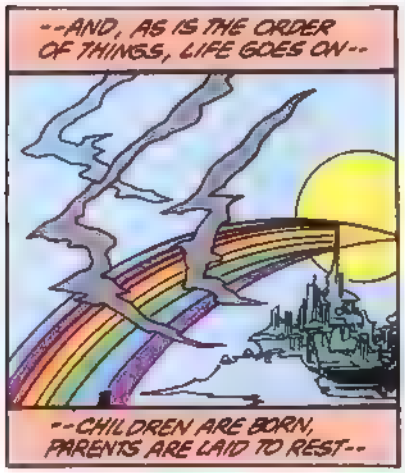

DO ME A FAVOR, AMBER, HONEY. DON'T CALL ME AUNTIE EM.
AND YOUR HOME IS RIGHT HERE--


--NOT SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW.

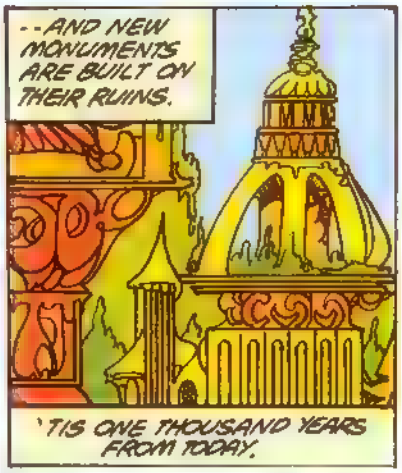

EPILOGUE
DRAPED BY MAGIC IN VELVET SPACE, THE GEMWORLD TURNS--
--ENDLESSLY SPINNING NIGHT INTO DAY--

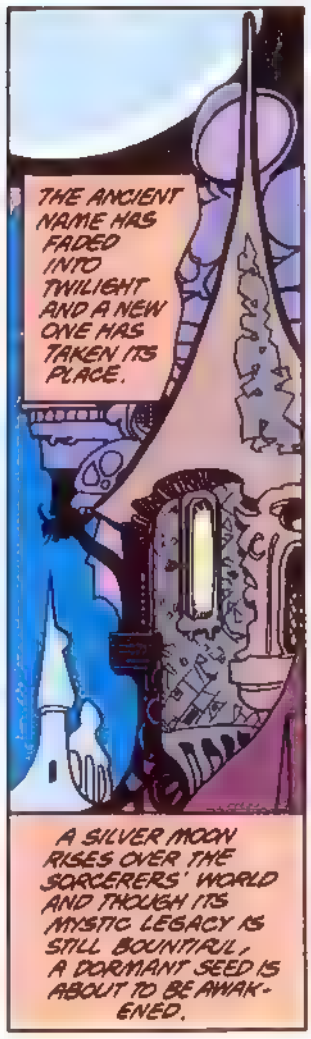
--INTO NIGHT--

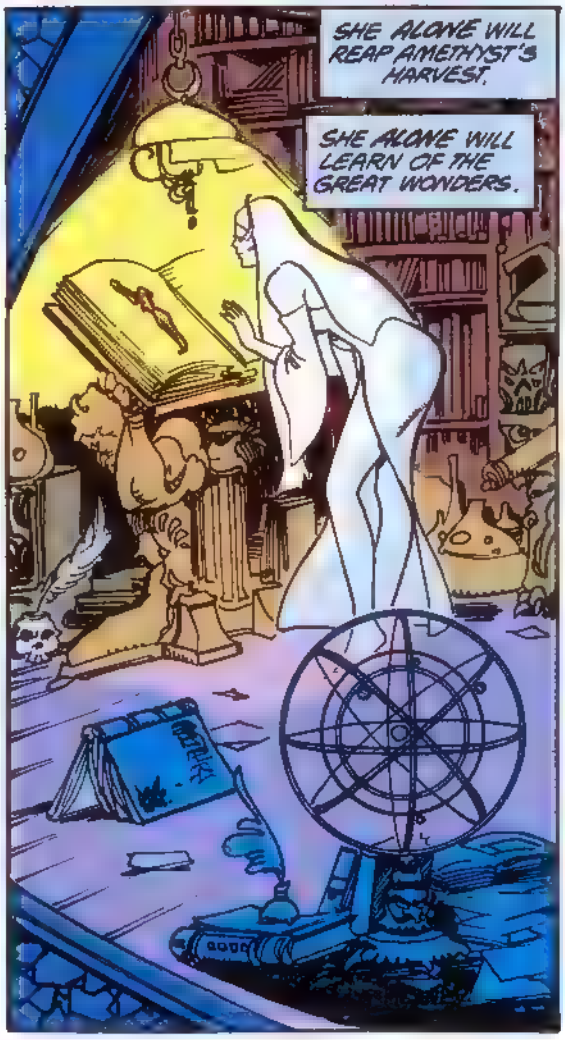

--INTO DAY--
--THE DAYS TURNING INTO MONTHS AND THEN INTO YEARS--


--AND, AS IS THE ORDER OF THINGS, LIFE GOES ON--
--CHILDREN ARE BORN, PARENTS ARE LAID TO REST--

--CASTLES CRUMBLE INTO DUST--


--AND NEW MONUMENTS ARE BUILT ON THEIR RUINS.
'TIS ONE THOUSAND YEARS FROM TODAY.


THE ANCIENT NAME HAS FADED INTO TWILIGHT AND A NEW ONE HAS TAKEN ITS PLACE.
A SILVER MOON RISES OVER THE SORCERERS' WORLD AND THOUGH ITS MYSTIC LEGACY IS STILL BOUNTIFUL, A DORMANT SEED IS ABOUT TO BE AWAKENED.


SHE ALONE WILL REAP AMETHYST'S HARVEST.
SHE ALONE WILL LEARN OF THE GREAT WONDERS.

SHE IS MYSA, THE WHITE WITCH...
...AND HER FUTURE HAS JUST BEGUN.
THE END?

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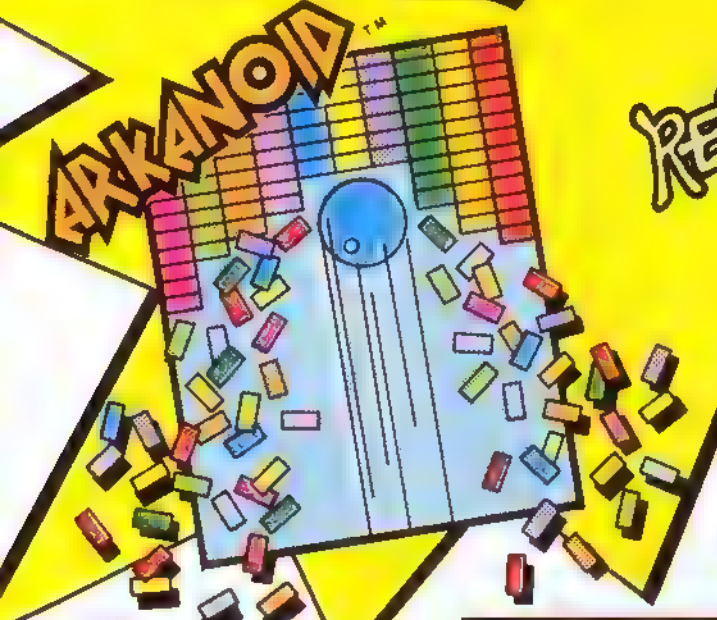

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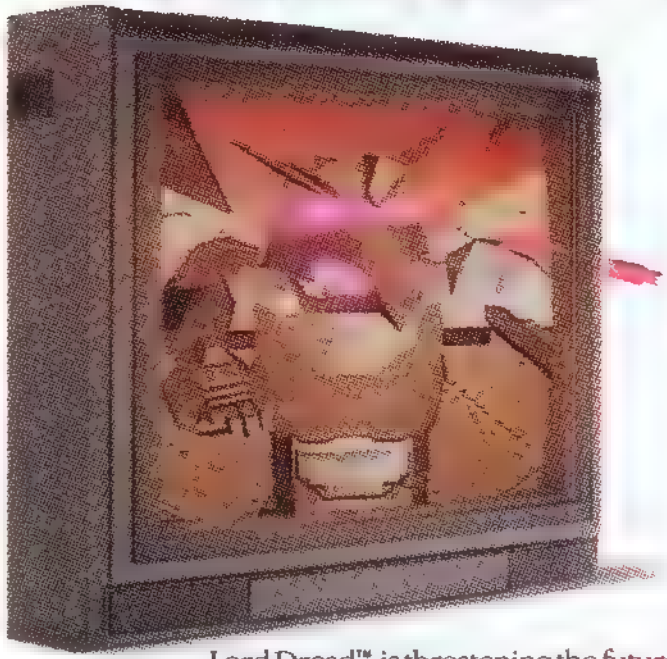

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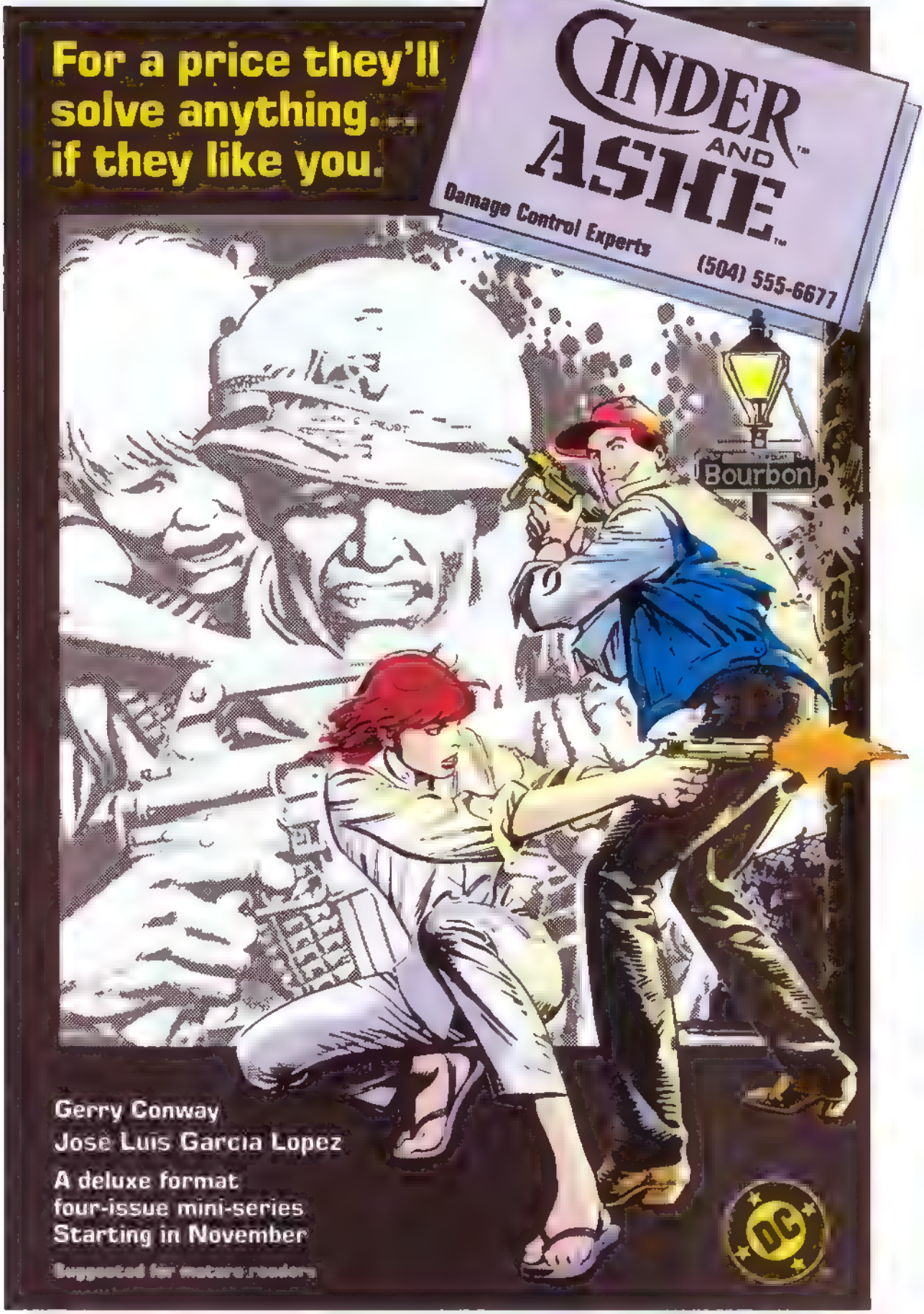

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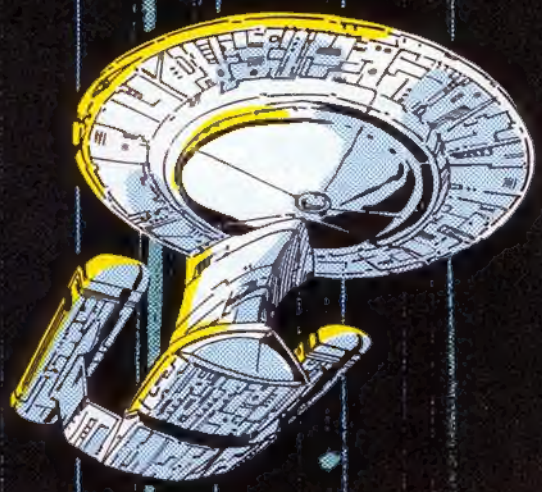

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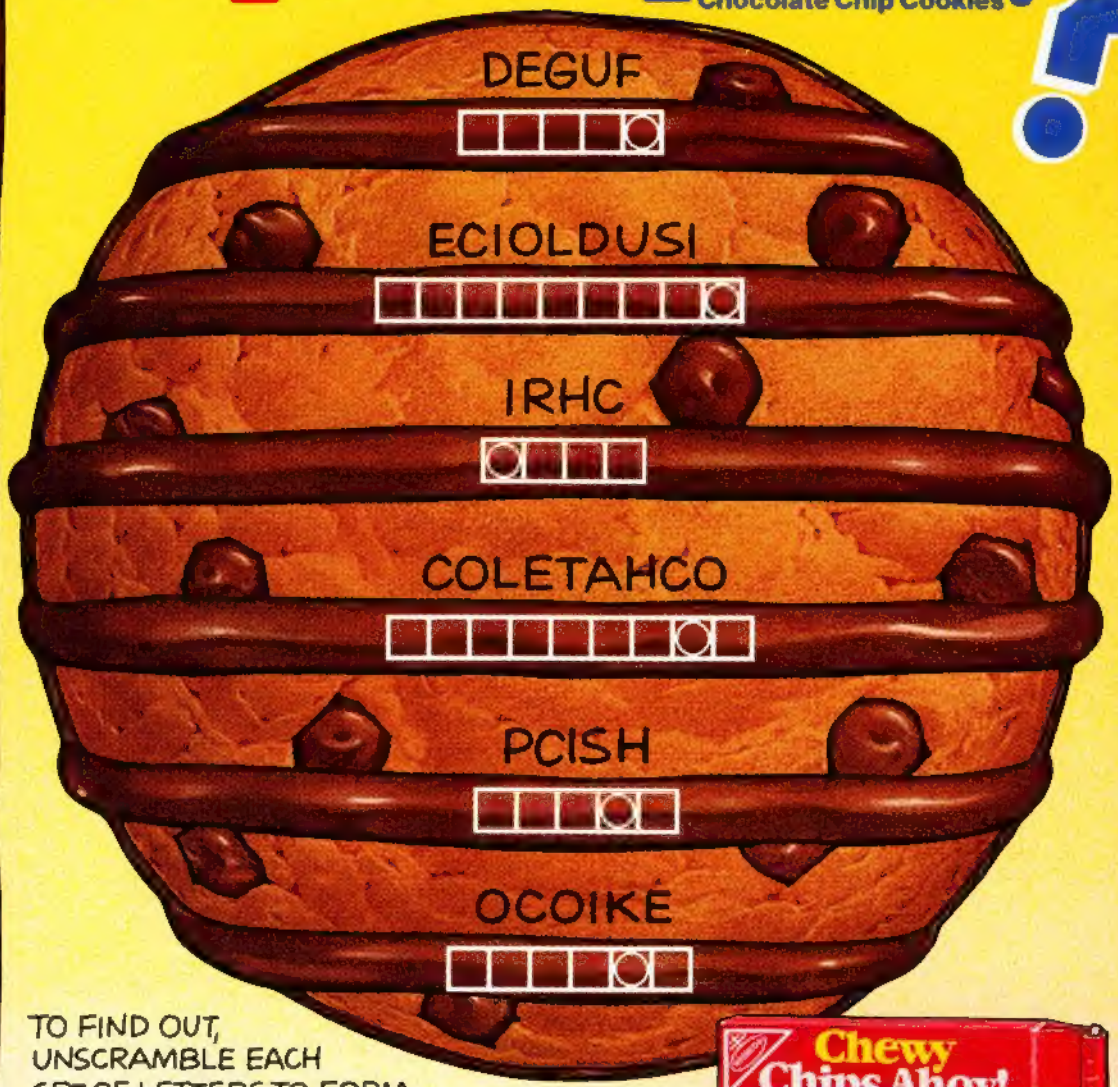

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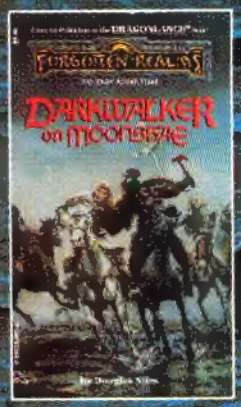

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